The Beginnings of Buddhism

J. W. DE JONG

IN RECENT YEARS there has been a lively discussion among scholars about the possibility of recovering the original message of the Buddha. A workshop on "Earliest Buddhism" held during the eighth World Sanskrit Conference in Leiden in August 1987 was directed to this end but did not bring about any reconciliation of the opposing views. It is, of course, not the first time that this problem has been discussed and the study of the figure of the Buddha and his message has been one of the central themes of Buddhist studies for the last one hundred and fifty years. It is impossible to do justice to all the different points of view in the course of one lecture, but it is perhaps worthwhile to re-examine some of the arguments which have been brought into the discussion.

If one speaks of "the beginnings of Buddhism" it is in the first place the Buddha himself who deserves our attention. What do we know about the Buddha? The legend of the Buddha, as it has been developed in the course of centuries, tells us in detail about his life from the day he was born (and even from long before his birth) to his Nirvāna. Scholars have tried to determine historical facts contained in the legend. For example, in *The Wonder that was India*, a book widely used in universities, Basham wrote: "Certain facts about the Buddha's life are reasonably certain. He was the son of a chief of the Śākyas, a small tribe of the Himālayan foothills. He became an ascetic, and propounded a new doctrine which gained the support of numerous disciples. After many years of teaching in the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha and in the tribal lands to the north of the Ganges, he died at the age of eighty at some time between the years 486 and 473 B.C., probably nearer the former date than the latter" (Basham, 1954, pp. 256–7). Basham discards almost the entire legend. Other scholars are more conservative in this regard and accept a greater part of the legend as historical fact.

How did Basham and those who reason like him arrive at these "reasonably certain facts"? Their method had been well characterised already in 1896 by Hendrik Kern who remarked that some "are of opinion that it will be possible by stripping the tale of its miraculous and mythical elements to find out the historic nucleus. Those are apt to believe that by the aid of their critical manipulations they can produce an image which is extremely like the original." (Kern, p. 12). However, as has been pointed out by Conze, the historical facts of his life cannot be isolated from the legend which all Buddhists accept (Conze, p. 34). In his last publication the great Belgian scholar Étienne Lamotte wrote: "It is not sufficient to discard the marvellous element in order to arrive at the historical truth. One does not write history by means of legends" (Lamotte, 1983, p. 6). To quote Conze once more: "The Buddha is a type that has been embodied in this individual—and it is the type which interests the religious life. . . . the Buddha is a kind of archetype which manifests itself in the world at different periods in different personalities, whose individual particularities are of no account whatsoever" (Conze, pp. 34–35). That the Buddha is a type and not an individual is obvious from the use of the word Buddha in the Jain scriptures in which Buddhas are often mentioned. In one passage it is said: "The Buddhas that were, and the Buddhas that will be, they [as it were] have Peace as their foundation, even as all things have the earth for their foundation" (Jacobi, 1895, pp. 314–5).

Another term used for the Buddha is Jina, 'the conqueror.' The same term is used for Mahāvīra, the founder of the Jains. The Buddhist texts often use still another term for the Buddha, Tathāgata. Much has been written on the meaning of it and no satisfactory explanation has been put forward. Even this term which seems to be so typical for Buddhism is found in Jain texts (cf. Jacobi, 1895, p. 320). There are many other designations of the Buddha of which we will mention only one, namely *śramaṇa*, in Pāli *samaṇa*, because it can tell us much about the origins of Buddhism. The word *samaṇa* is used by the people for the followers of the Buddha and for the Buddha himself who is often called the *samaṇa* Gotama (Franke, 1913, p. 304). The *samaṇas* are mostly described as wandering ascetics and comprise apart from the bhikkhus, all those who make efforts—the root *śram-* means 'to make efforts'—in their religious strivings. The texts often mention together brahmans and *samaṇas*. This division seems to have been well

established because it is also found in the account of the Greek Megasthenes who visited the city of Pāṭaliputra—present-day Patna —around 300 B.C. From the texts we learn two important matters about the Buddha. By his followers he is considered to be a Buddha, 'the awakened one' who has seen the ultimate truth which he teaches to his followers. By the people he is considered to be a *samaṇa* and to belong to the *samaṇas* who are distinguished from the brahmans.

It is perhaps difficult to understand that from the moment the Buddha obtained *bodhi*, 'the awakening,' he was no longer an ordinary human being. Some scholars believe that he was considered to be a human master as long as his memory was still preserved by direct witnesses of his life (Bareau, 1980, p. 8). This is a supposition which is not confirmed by the texts. When, soon after having obtained *bodhi*, he was addressed by his name and with the epithet "your reverence," he replied: "Do not, monks, address a *tathāgata* by name and with the epithet 'your reverence' " (V. I, p. 9). When Upaka, a follower of the Ājīvika sect, saw the Buddha he spoke thus to him: "Your reverence, your sense-organs are quite pure, your complexion very bright, very clear. On account of whom have you, your reverence, gone forth, or who is your teacher, or whose *dhamma* do you profess?" The Buddha replied:

> "Victorious over all, omniscient am I,/ Among all things undefiled,/ Leaving all, through destruction of craving freed,/ By knowing for myself, whom should I follow?/. . . For me there is no teacher,/ One like me does not exist,/ In the world with its *devas*/ No one equals me./ For I am arhat in the world, I am the teacher supreme,/ I alone am all-awakened, I have become cool, have obtained nirvana."
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> (Horner, 1951, pp. 11–12, with a few changes)

The Buddha did not learn the truth from a teacher but arrived at it by himself. He did not discover a new truth. In a famous text the Buddha proclaims that he has seen an ancient road, an ancient path followed by the Buddhas of former times (S II, 106). Important in this proclamation is the word 'seen'. What the Buddha sees is the *dhamma*, an eternally existing truth which before him was seen by previous Buddhas.

Already in the Vedas the Vedic poets are said to have seen by an inner vision the Vedic hymns. The Vedic seer (*ṛṣi*) sees the mysterious

divine things with the inner eye (Geldner, I, 1951, p. 2, n. 2). In other religions it is the ear which is the important organ of sense because it is with the ear that the prophet hears the message of the god. In India among the means of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) it is always perception (*pratyakṣa*) which is mentioned in the first place. Insight into the supernatural truth is obtained by an inner vision. The Indian equivalent for our word philosophy is *darśana*, literally seeing, the word used to designate the six philosophical systems.

In 1956 the Buddha Jayanti festivities commemorated the Buddha's Nirvāṇa in 544 B.C., two thousand five hundred years earlier, since 544 B.C. is the traditional date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa in the Theravāda countries, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. In 1837 George Turnour noticed a discrepancy of sixty years in the traditional Theravāda chronology. This brought the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa to 484/483 B.C. and since that time most Western scholars have adopted this date with minor differences. Basham speaks "of some date between 486 and 473 B.C." In a recent history of India published in 1982 it is said to be "the first historical date in Indian history" (Bechert, 1991, p. 3). However, there have always been scholars who pointed out that this date was a traditional date and not a historically verified date.

In recent years Heinz Bechert has re-examined the different chronologies used in Theravāda and Mahāyāna countries for the life of the Buddha. In April 1988 he organised a symposium on "The Date of the Historical Buddha and the Importance of its Determination for Historiography and World History," in which this problem was studied from all possible angles. A volume of more than five hundred pages has just been published and there are two more to follow. No consensus was reached by the participants of the symposium, but there was a general tendency to reject the early date of circa 480 B.C. in favour of a later date ranging from 420 to 350 B.C. (Bechert, 1991a, p. 15). Bechert rightly remarks that the only way to fix the date of the Nirvāṇa seems to be the use of indirect evidence (1991b, p. 235). However, it is doubtful that the indirect evidence (p. 10) suffices to conclude that the Buddha's Nirvāṇa took place in the fourth century. For the time being it is perhaps advisable not to go beyond the very vague statement that the Buddha lived in the state of Magadha in Eastern India between 600 and 300 B.C.

Are we better informed about the teachings of the Buddha than

about the dates of his life? In the first place, there is the problem of the language in which the Buddha preached. It is generally assumed that the Buddha spoke the local language, i.e., in Magadha Māgadhī and in other countries the dialect of that country. Probably at his time the differences between the dialects of Middle Indo-Aryan in Eastern India were not very great, and it was easy to switch from one language or dialect to another. However, nothing remains of the original wording of the sermons of the Buddha. His sermons have been transmitted to us in Pāli, a language which was developed later as the literary language of the Buddhist scriptures belonging to one of the Buddhist schools, the school of the Elders, the Theravādins, which is followed at present by Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. According to tradition the Pāli texts and the commentaries were transmitted to Ceylon in the third century B.C. Both texts and commentaries were written down in the first century B.C. Even if this information, which is found in Ceylonese chronicles written several centuries later, is correct, this does not mean that the texts written down at that time are the same as those we have at present. There are no old manuscripts of Pāli texts. The oldest dated manuscripts which have been preserved in Theravāda countries were written in the fifteenth century of our era. It seems likely that the Pāli scriptures as we have them at present were more or less known in the same form at the time of the famous commentator Buddhaghosa in the fifth century A.D. (Walpola Rāhula, 1956, p. xix). For many centuries the Buddhist texts were not only transmitted orally but translated from their original wording in Māgadhī and related dialects into Pāli, a process of which the details are obscure.

It is only in Pāli that there is a canon, i.e., a closed and fixed collection of texts. The Pali scriptures are called the *tipiṭaka*, 'the three baskets,' and comprise the Vinaya, the rules of the congregations of monks and nuns, the Sutta Piṭaka which contains the teachings of the Buddha and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka, the scholastic categories of Buddhism. The arrangement of the texts in these three Piṭakas is a systematic one. For instance, the Sutta Piṭaka comprises five collections (nikāyas), four of which contain the discourses ascribed to the Buddha, namely the Dīgha-nikāya containing 34 long suttas, the Majjhima-nikāya which contains 152 suttas of middle length, the Saṃyutta-nikāya comprising 2889 suttas grouped together (*saṃyutta*) according to their contents in 56 saṃyuttas and finally the Aṅguttara-nikāya,

a collection of more than 2300 suttas arranged in eleven sections according to the number of the section. Whereas the suttas in these four collections are for the most part in prose, the fifth collection, the Khuddaka-nikāya, comprises many famous texts in verse such as the Dhammapada, the Suttanipāta, the Theragāthā and the Therīgāthā.

It is not surprising that in such a large collection of texts—the Sutta Piṭaka comprises twenty-four volumes in the edition of the Pāli Text Society—there are divergencies and inconsistencies. One way to explain these inconsistencies is to consider them the result of chronological development in the teachings of the Buddha himself or in the teachings of early Buddhism. Various attempts have been made to distinguish different layers. One such attempt was made by Mrs. Rhys Davids who, together with her husband, did important work in editing and translating Pāli texts. In the last twenty years of her life she developed a very surprising and revolutionary theory about the original teaching of the Buddha or Sakya doctrine as she called it. (C. A. F. Rhys Davids, 1928, 1932, 1934). According to her the monks and the monastic tradition have fundamentally changed the very essence of the original teaching.

One of the basic doctrines of Buddhism is that of the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the Way that leads to the cessation of suffering. According to Mrs. Rhys Davids the fourth Truth about the Way is the most important and it is due to later monastic tampering that it was degraded to the fourth place. The message of the Way "was a message to laymen, for the welfare in their work and growth in that life, not in the leaving of it. . . . It was later, when the monks and the monk-spirit became paramount, that the very wording of records took on monastic values." Another basic doctrine of early Buddhism is that of "non-self." However, according to Mrs. Rhys Davids the Buddha taught a self, a man-in-man, her rendering of the word *attā*, 'self.' Leading Western scholars completely rejected her reconstruction of an original Sakya doctrine (Winternitz, 1929, 1931, 1933, 1936; de La Vallée Poussin, 1937, pp. 257–8). Conze rightly remarked in his book on Buddhism that all the attempts to reconstruct an 'original' Buddhism have one thing in common: "They all agree that the Buddha's doctrine was certainly not what the Buddhists understood it to be" (Conze, 1951, p. 27).

In the thirties another attempt to reconstruct an older, precanonical

Buddhism was made by the Polish scholar Stanislas Schayer (Schayer, 1935, 1936, 1937). According to Schayer there are texts in the canon which are contradictory to the generally admitted canonical viewpoint, and these texts must be considered to be survivals of an older, precanonical Buddhism. It is not possible to explain in detail Schayer's concept of precanonical Buddhism. One of his main conclusions was the thesis that consciousness in early Buddhism was an eternal, indestructible Element which is in clear contradiction with the canonical teaching about universal impermanence. Schayer assumed that Buddhism always has as its final goal deliverance from *saṃsāra*, but that this deliverance was in its original form not an extinction of personality. It was *mokṣa* (deliverance) but not nirvāṇa. Schayer died in 1941 at the age of 42. His early death cut short a brilliant career. It is a pity that Schayer was not able to develop his ideas more systematically. However, his ideas inspired the work of his pupil Constantin Regamey who developed the ideas of Schayer in his study of Indian Buddhism and in an article on the problem of original Buddhism in connection with the work of Schayer (Regamey, 1951, 1957). Schayer remarks that he rejects as quite impossible the theory that Buddhism was altered by later generations so radically as to make it entirely contradictory to its original form. However, to eliminate, for instance, as Schayer himself did, the notion of Nirvāṇa from the doctrine of early Buddhism is undoubtedly a radical alteration of traditional Buddhism. Schayer's work has the merit of pointing out some important concepts which are found in the Buddhist scriptures and which do not cohere perfectly with the concepts of canonical Buddhism, but it seems impossible to take them as the basis for the reconstruction of a precanonical Buddhism. Since then, apart from Regamey, no other scholar has taken up his reconstruction of a precanonical Buddhism.

Schayer was of the opinion that it was not possible to have any certainty as to the nature of the Buddha's teaching. Erich Frauwallner's opinion is quite different. He tried to explain divergences in the teachings as progress and development in the ideas of the Buddha himself (Frauwallner 1953). Frauwallner quotes the first sermon, which the Buddha delivered to a group of five monks in the deer-park of Isipatana near Benares. The Buddha first explains the Middle Way: "These two extremes, O monks, are not to be practised by one who has gone forth from the world. What are the two? That conjoined with the

passions, low, vulgar, common, ignoble, and useless, and that conjoined with self-torture, painful, ignoble, and useless. Avoiding these two extremes the Tathāgata has gained the knowledge of the Middle Way, which gives sight and knowledge and tends to calm, to insight, enlightenment, Nirvāṇa." Thereupon the Buddha explains the four noble truths: "Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of pain: birth is painful old age is painful, sickness is painful, death is painful, sorrow, lamentation, dejection, and despair are painful. Contact with unpleasant things is painful, not getting what one wishes is painful. In short the five khandhas of grasping (i.e., the five constituent elements of the person) are painful.—Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cause of pain: that craving, which leads to rebirth, combined with pleasure and lust, finding pleasure here and there, namely the craving for passion, the craving for existence, the craving for non-existence.—Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the cessation of pain: the cessation without a remainder of that craving, abandonment, forsaking, release, non-attachment.—Now this, O monks, is the noble truth of the way that leads to the cessation of pain: this is the noble Eightfold Path, namely, right views, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration" (E. J. Thomas, 1927, p. 87). Frauwallner believes that this sermon of which I have quoted only some of the main passages, faithfully reflects the memory of the insight gained by the Buddha himself (Frauwallner, p. 183). According to him this sermon explains in simple terms the truth which the Buddha had discovered in the night of Awakening. However, thereafter he continued for more than forty years to explain his doctrine and it became necessary to give more detailed explanations to his followers. In this way more detailed instructions on the way to deliverance were developed by him in the course of time.

In 1963, ten years after the publication of Frauwallner's book, André Bareau published his *Studies on the biography of the Buddha in the Sūtrapiṭakas and the ancient Vinayapiṭakas*: From the quest of the Awakening to the conversion of Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. In his work Bareau studies a number of Pāli and Chinese texts which deal with the period in the life of the Buddha from the quest for Awakening to the conversion of his two famous pupils Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. Bareau reproaches previous scholars with having used documents of different origin without taking into account their date. His

work is based on a small number of texts belonging to the Sūtra and Vinaya sections of the Tripiṭaka, texts which he considers to be older than others found in the same sections.

In order to illustrate the method Bareau applies to the study of these texts it is useful to consider in more detail his investigation of the first sermon of the Buddha, the Sūtra of the Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, in Pāli the *Dhammacakkaparivattanasutta*, of which I have quoted the parts dealing with the two extremes, the Middle Way and the Four Truths. Frauwallner believed that this sermon faithfully reflected the oldest teachings of the Buddha. Bareau arrives at a different conclusion by comparing the Pāli text with the first part of the sermon dealing with the two extremes and the Middle Way found in other texts which, however, do not make mention of the Four Truths. One text comprises only the first part of the sermon and is addressed not to the five monks but to an indeterminate number of monks. Bareau sees in it a memory of an old version in which this sermon was not addressed to Buddha's first disciples but to the monks in general.

From the study of the texts relating to the first sermon Bareau concludes that the first part dealing with the two extremes and the Middle Way is the oldest both in style and contents. However, another text, the discourse on the Ariyan quest (*Āriyapariyesanasutta, Majjhima-nikāya* 26), also contains a sermon addressed to the five monks. In this sermon the Buddha deals with the five objects of desire: material shapes, sounds, smells, tastes and touches, and teaches the different stages of meditation. Bareau remarks that the silence regarding the Four Truths in this text and in the corresponding Chinese text is perhaps not only an indication of resistance against a tendency to put the doctrine of the Four Truths on the first plan, but also a testimony of ignorance with regard to the theme of the first sermon. Bareau concludes that there are divergent traditions regarding the contents of the first sermon, traditions which probably existed in most of the schools and go back to the period before the great schisms in the fourth and third centuries B.C.

In the concluding chapter of his book Bareau draws a number of conclusions from his analysis of the texts selected by him. He points out that the sūtras are composed of episodes belonging to different traditions. These episodes have been incorporated because they illustrate important points of doctrine. Although these sūtras belong to different

schools they show a common plan. According to Bareau this can be explained in three ways:

1. There were few differences between the schools.
2. It was in the early period easy to borrow from other schools.
3. They go back to a period when the three schools in question had not yet become different schools, i.e., towards the end of the fourth century B.C.

The sūtras describe the life of the Buddha until and including his awakening. The biographies in the Vinayas begin with the Awakening. Bareau believes that they were composed mainly for three reasons:

1. To justify the ordination ceremonies of the first converts.
2. To glorify the Buddha.
3. They took much material from local guides to such holy places as Uruvelā and Benares.

According to Bareau these biographies of the Buddha in the Vinayas go back to a common source, a source which predates the formation of the three schools to which these Vinayas (Theravādin, Mahīśāsaka and Dharmaguptaka) belong in the second half of the third century and the first half of the second century. As to the formation of the legends Bareau distinguishes several motives. One is the desire to justify certain points of doctrine which the Buddha is considered to have taught. In other cases, the legends illustrate certain doctrines which are not directly related to the biography of the Buddha, but which were considered important. Other passages again have as their aim to teach monastic rules. In the Vinayas one finds also the desire of the compilers to glorify the congregation by stories of conversions and ordinations.

With regard to the development of the doctrine Bareau distinguishes more than five stages. In the first stage Nirvāṇa is seen as deliverance from death as much as from suffering, as the definitive cessation of the series of rebirths and existences. The original goal of Buddhism is a state of eternal beatitude in which rebirth is extinguished. However, nothing is said about the method necessary to arrive at that state, and we do not know whether it is sufficient to become aware of the true reality or whether one must follow a series of meditations or adhere to a set of moral rules. Nothing is said either of the law of *karman*. As concerns the Four Truths mention is made only of the first and third Truths, those concerning suffering and cessation of suffering, whereas the classical doctrine is more interested in the second and fourth

Truths. The Four Truths are only described in the second stage of development of the doctrine, and the famous doctrine of dependent production appears only at the third stage.

Bareau did not take sufficiently into account the nature of his sources. The texts which he studied were for many centuries transmitted orally before being committed to writing. As mentioned before, according to tradition, the Pāli scriptures were written down in the first century B.C., but probably did not obtain more or less their present form before the time of Buddhaghosa, i.e., the fifth century A.D. Bareau himself remarks that the Pāli scriptures of the Theravāda school have been altered and made uniform, perhaps during the council held at Anurādhapura during the reign of king Vaṭṭagāmaṇī, in the first century before our era. As regards the Chinese translations of the texts studied by Bareau they were mostly translated about 400 A.D. from an Indian original. It is not easy to know in which Indian dialects these texts were written down before being sent to China. In several instances Chinese translators did not have manuscripts at their disposal, but an Indian Buddhist monk recited the text by heart and translators rendered it into Chinese.

However, it is not in the first place the fact that these texts were transmitted for centuries before being written down that makes them very unreliable witnesses to historical events. It is their very nature as oral texts which makes it impossible to use them as material for a historical study. For instance, Bareau rightly pointed that the texts are composed of different episodes. For instance, one text can be divided into three parts, A, B and C. Another text comprises only parts A and B. It is not possible to draw the conclusion that part C has been added later. Different oral traditions existed at the same time, for instance, some mentioned one topic as being preached by the Buddha in his first sermon, others another topic. It would be arbitrary to decide which topic is the one which reflects the historical reality. It is only when we have truly historical documents of which date and place of composition are known with at least approximative certitude that it is possible to construct a chronology and to build up a historical picture. In the case of the Buddhist texts in question, the Pāli scriptures and the corresponding Chinese texts, the nature of the material makes it only possible to distinguish the main themes. The texts do not allow us to discover a historical kernel in the legend of the Buddha but they give us much

information about the teachings of early Buddhism. However, this information does not tell us which topics were taught first and which later. It is only when there are other non-Buddhist sources that it becomes possible to distinguish earlier and later elements.

Bareau's work is the most ambitious attempt ever made by a Western scholar to reconstruct the early Buddhist doctrine by means of a comparative study of the Pāli texts of the Theravāda school and the texts of other schools which are known in Chinese translations. Most general books on Buddhism still quote almost exclusively from the Pāli texts for the oldest period of Buddhism. Bareau's work is an excellent illustration of the analytical study of the Buddhist texts which attempts to establish stages of doctrinal development by means of a comparative study of canonical texts. This method has been applied in recent years by pupils of Frauwallner: Lambert Schmithausen and Tilmann Vetter (Schmithausen, 1981; Vetter 1985, 1989, 1990), and in Japan by Noritoshi Aramaki (cf. de Jong, 1991, p. 34). Schmithausen, however, does not believe that it is possible to ascribe any such stage of development to a definite date or even to the Buddha himself, as has been done by Frauwallner (Schmithausen, 1990, p. 2). Other scholars completely reject the analytical method and, to quote Schmithausen, "stress the fundamental homogeneity and substantial authenticity of at least a considerable part of the Nikāyic (canonical) materials." According to these scholars "the canonical texts are taken to yield a fairly coherent picture of the authentic doctrine of the Buddha himself" (Schmithausen, 1990, p. 1).

In the presence of such a fundamental opposition between two opposing views one wonders whether or not it is possible to find a middle way. It is of course true that there are divergencies and even contradictions in the Buddhist canon. The Buddhists themselves have been aware of this fact. In a Pāli text, probably originally written in Sanskrit or Prakrit in India, *The Questions of Milinda*, a large portion deals with the solution of puzzles that arise from apparently contradictory statements made by the Buddha. They are presented in the form of 82 dilemmas put to the monk Nāgasena by king Milinda whose name is based upon that of the Greek king Menander who ruled in the second century B.C. in the northwest of India (cf. Norman, 1983, pp. 110–112). Let us quote as example a passage mentioned before, i.e., the one in which the Buddha proclaimed that he had seen an ancient road, an an-

cient path followed by the Buddhas of former times. Milinda remarks that the Lord also said: "The Tathāgata, monks, arahant, Perfect Buddha, is one who makes arise a Way that was not arisen" (Mil., p. 217; Horner, 1964, p. 11). According to Milinda one of these statements must be false. Nāgasena disagrees and says that both statements are correct. According to Nāgasena the Buddha said that he had seen an ancient road because when he was meditating with his eye of wisdom he discovered it. Because he made that road practicable he said that he is one who makes arise a Way that was not arisen. In our eyes Nāgasena's solution is rather a play with words. If we follow the method of textual analysis, we see that the statement that the Buddha makes arise a Way that was not arisen occurs three times in the canon. In one place this statement is made by the Buddha himself (S. III, p. 66); in two other places, however, it is made by Sāriputta and by Ānanda, respectively, two pupils of the Buddha (S. I, p. 191; M. III, p. 8). In these two places the following words follow: "But the disciples are now Way-followers following after him" (Horner, III, 1959, pp. 58–59). It is possible that this is the original context in which it was said that the Buddha makes arise a Way that was not arisen. In the first place the last part of the passage was omitted and the statement became attributed to the Buddha himself. However, it could well be the other way round. The Buddha made these apparently contradictory statements in different circumstances. The statement that he made arise a Way that was not arisen was later attributed to Sāriputta and Ānanda and complemented by the words that now his disciples followed that road after the Buddha.

This example shows the difficulties of textual analysis. We must accept the fact that there are divergencies and contradictions in the Buddhist scriptures. In one of the edicts of Asoka there is the phrase "everything which was said by the Blessed One, the Buddha, was well-said." In a Pāli sutta the monk Uttara explains to Sakka, the king of the gods, that "whatever is well-spoken is all the word of the Blessed one" (Weller, 1957; Collins, 1990, p. 94). In the most recent study of this phrase Steven Collins writes that the point of the remark is here simply that Uttara is saying that what he teaches comes from the Buddha but that grammatically there would be nothing wrong with interpreting his remark in the Mahāyānist sense according to which "the eternal truth of the Dharma may be revealed in texts of any and every historical provenance" (Collins, 1990, p. 94). One must not forget that

for centuries the words of the Buddha were transmitted orally until they were written down and became the Buddhist scriptures. According to the Buddhist tradition there were from time to time meetings, called 'Councils' in English. The Pāli term is *saṅgīti* which means 'singing' or 'reciting together.' The accounts we have of these councils are unreliable but it is quite possible that they did take place. In the course of time it became necessary to fix rules to determine the authenticity of texts which were being recited. According to these rules it was necessary that the text was not contradictory to the spirit of the sutras and the Vinaya and the Buddhist dharma in general (Lamotte, 1947). It is obvious that these rules allowed a great latitude and that there must have been strong reasons before a text was rejected as not correct. Probably some schools were stricter in the application of these rules than others. It is only in the case of the school of the Theravādins that a complete collection of their suttas has been preserved. From the collections of other schools there remain only fragments in Sanskrit. A great number of texts is preserved in Chinese translation, but only a few of them have been translated into Western languages and/or compared with parallel Pāli texts. It will be a task for the future to study in detail all these texts and to try to determine their points of agreement and disagreement. From the work which has been done so far it appears that divergencies between different versions of a sutta are, as remarked by Cousins, "typically greatest in matters of little importance—such items as the location of suttas, the names of individual speakers or the precise order of occurrence of events. Only very rarely are they founded on doctrinal or sectarian differences" (Cousins, 1983, p. 5). If further research proves this conclusion to be correct, it would follow that fundamental divergencies and contradictions between the teachings found in different canonical texts existed already in the time which preceded the formation of the schools. As we have seen there is a fundamental difference of view between the analysts who attach great importance to these divergencies and the 'unitarians'—to use this term for lack of a better one—who stress the homogeneity of the canonical texts. If one rejects both extremes, is one then obliged to opt for the sceptical point of view advanced by scholars who, according to Schmithausen are "extremely sceptical with regard to the possibility of retrieving the doctrine of earliest Buddhism, not to speak of the Buddha's own doctrine, from the canonical texts as we now have them"? (Schmithausen, 1990, p. 2).

Strictly speaking, the sceptics are certainly right. There is simply not enough evidence to reconstruct in their exact wording the doctrines of early Buddhism. However, there are many texts which agree in proclaiming again and again the same doctrines. It seems most likely that these doctrines originated in the early period of Buddhism. This point of view which has been called pragmatic, or conservative, or orthodox, or traditionalist by its opponents represents a middle way which avoids extreme points of view. It is not possible to believe in the homogeneity of the canonical texts in view of the contradictions found in them. Also, there is no doubt that they contain many later accretions. On the other hand, it would be hypercritical to assert that nothing can be said about the doctrine of earliest Buddhism. We cannot read the mind of the Buddha but he would not have been venerated as the founder of Buddhism if he had not made a great impact on his hearers by his teaching. The basic ideas of Buddhism as found in the canonical writings could very well have been proclaimed by him, transmitted and developed by his disciples and, finally, codified in fixed formulas.

The message of the Buddha was preached by the monks everywhere and gradually different schools arose. It is by these schools that the texts were orally collected and finally written down. It is not surprising that in the absence of a central authority divergencies are found in the scriptures but it is only after the beginning of Mahāyāna that entirely new developments become visible.

For the study of early Buddhism it is important to try to determine the background from which Buddhism arose. Buddhist scriptures mention many schools of śramaṇas. The first sutta of the Dīgha-nikāya, the *Brahmajālasutta*, enumerates 62 different philosophical views, from which the follower of the Buddha is to keep away (Norman, 1983, p. 33; a Jain text even mentions 363 philosophical schools (Jacobi, 1895, p. 385). The only school whose scriptures have been transmitted are the Jains. They are mentioned several times in the Buddhist scriptures, whereas the Buddhists are rarely mentioned in the Jain scriptures (Jacobi, 1895, p. 414). It is therefore possible that Jainism is older than Buddhism. There are some striking similarities in the doctrines of Jains and Buddhists. Both stress the importance of *ahiṃsā* although this is carried much further in Jainism. The doctrine of *ahiṃsā* strikes at the heart of Brahmanism in which animal sacrifices play such an important role. Both Jainism and Buddhism reject ritual purity as taught by

Brahmanism. A Jain text proclaims: "For if perfection could be obtained by contact with water, many beings living in water must have reached perfection: fishes, tortoises, aquatic snakes, cormorants, otters, and demons living in water" (Jacobi, 1985, pp. 294–5). The same idea occurs in a Buddhist text, the *Therīgāthā:* "Who indeed told you this, ignorant to the ignorant: 'Truly he is released from his evil action by ablution in water.' Now (if this is so) all frogs and turtles will go to heaven, and alligators and crocodiles and the other water-dwellers" (Norman, 1971, p. 26: see also notes on 87–91, p. 81; Ud. I, 9). Both the Jains and the Buddhists declare that he who is usually called a brahman is not a true brahman. To quote a few lines from a Jain text: "He who is exempt from love, hatred, and fear, (and he who shines forth) like burnished gold, purified in fire, him we call a Brāhmaṇa," and "By one's actions one becomes a Brāhmaṇa, or a *kṣatriya*, or a *vaiśya* or a *śūdra*" (Jacobi, 1895, pp. 138–140). And from a Buddhist text, the *Suttanipāta:* "Whose passion and hatred, and conceit and hypocrisy have been made to fall off, like a mustard seed (falling) from the point of an awl, him I call a brahman," and "Not by birth does one become a brahman; not by birth does one become a non-brahman. By action one becomes a brahman; by action one becomes a non-brahman" (SN 631 and 650; Norman, 1984, pp. 106–107).

The Buddha proclaimed that he had seen an ancient road, an ancient path followed by the Buddhas of former times. A Jain text declares: "Learn from me, with attentive minds, the road shown by the buddhas, which leads a monk who follows it, to the end of all misery" (Jacobi, 1895, p. 203). Not only is there a common ground in the Jain scriptures and the Buddhist scriptures. Recent studies have shown that the same verses occur in the scriptures of both religions. These verses belong to the oldest parts of the Jain and Buddhist canons (Bollée, 1980, 1983; Nakamura, 1983; Yamazaki, 1991a, b). In a two-volume study of the ideas of early Buddhism, Nakamura has tried to reconstruct the oldest form of the Buddhist teachings on the basis of the older verses in the Buddhist canon (Nakamura, 1970–1). Objections have rightly been raised against this method (Murakami, 1979). The fact that many of these verses have parallels in non-Buddhist texts indicates that they belong to collections of verses current among the śramaṇas, the wandering ascetics. Some of these verses are also found in

other texts such as the *Mahābhārata*. It is therefore possible to obtain some knowledge of the ideas and practices of the śramaṇas at the time of the Buddha by studying the ideas shared by the Jains and Buddhists and the poetry of the śramaṇas which have been preserved in Jain and Buddhist canonical scriptures.

It will never be possible to know exactly, or even approximately, the contents of the teachings of the Buddha himself. However, the basic ideas of early Buddhism are so often repeated in the canonical scriptures in Pāli, Sanskrit and Chinese that they remain our best guide to the teachings, if not of the Buddha himself, then at least of Buddhism in its early period.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ArchOr	*Archív orientální*
IT	*Indologica Taurinensia*
JPTS	*Journal of the Pali Text Society*
MCB	*Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*
NAWG	*Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*. I Philologisch-historische Klasse
OLZ	*Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*
PBO	*Polski Biuletyn Orientalistyczny*
PTS	*Pali Text Society*
RO	*Rocznik Orientalistyczny*
VQ	*The Visva-Bharati Quarterly*

PALI TEXTS

M.	*Majjhima-nikāya*. Vol. 1 edited by V. Trenckner; Vols. 2 and 3 by Robert Chalmers; Vol. 4 by Mrs. Rhys Davids. PTS. London, 1888–1925.
Mil.	*Milindapañha*. Edited by V. Trenckner. London, 1880.
S.	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*. Edited by Léon Feer. 5 Vols. PTS. London, 1884–1898. Indexes by Mrs. Rhys Davids. PTS. London, 1904.
SN.	*Suttanipāta*. Edited by Dines Andersen and Helmer Smith. PTS. London, 1913.
Ud.	*Udāna*. Edited by Paul Steinthal. PTS. London, 1885.
V.	*Vinaya-piṭakam*. Edited by Hermann Oldenberg. 5 Vols. PTS. London, 1879–1883.

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